

**In the Abstract**

Please amend the "Abstract" on page 25, as follows:

**ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE**

According to one embodiment of the invention, a method for providing communications service in a communications ring undergoing an upgrade process is provided. ~~The communications ring is formed from a plurality of existing nodes each operable to transmit, at an existing rate, a first frame having a number of occupied time slots equal to N occupied by data. N is an integer. The method~~ includes increasing ~~[[the]]~~ an existing rate of a node to a higher rate. With the increase, the node is operable to transmit a second frame at the higher rate. The second frame has a higher number of time slots than ~~[[the]]~~ a first frame having a number of slots equal to N. The method also includes occupying a number of the time slots of the second frame equal to N using data to be received by an existing node. The method also includes providing at least one identifier to the existing node that will receive the second frame. The identifier identifies the occupied time slots of the second frame. The method also includes transmitting the second frame of data to the existing node.